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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUANDA 000775

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TAGS: PREL MAAR MOPS AO

SUBJECT: ANGOLAN DEFENSE OFFICIALS SUPPORTIVE OF ENGAGEMENT
DURING HOLMES VISIT

REF: LUANDA 760

(U) Classified by CDA Jeff Hawkins, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. The Angolan defense establishment rolled out the red carpet for visiting AFRICOM Deputy to the Commander Ambassador Tony Holmes during his December 15-16 visit, with calls on the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of Angola (FAA), the acting Minister of Defense, and the Commander of the Angolan Navy. Holmes told his Angolan interlocutors how important AFRICOM and the USG generally considered Angola and sought Angolan views on common defense issues. The Angolan officials praised on-going engagement with the U.S. - particularly in the health, English language teaching, and engineering spheres - but also made clear that deepened engagement would come as a result of a "political decision" at the highest levels. There was in-depth dialog on developments in the DRC (covered reftel). Holmes's meetings suggested a strong interest in working with the United States on the part of the Angolan armed forces, but caution on the part of FAA officers until they had the proper signal from their political leadership. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Deputy to the Commander of AFRICOM Ambassador Tony Holmes visited Angola December 15-16. Holmes met with the acting Minister of Defense Gaspar Rufino, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces General Francisco Furtado, and Commander of the Navy Admiral Augusto da Silva Cunha. He dined with Vice Ministers of Defense and Interior, toured a military HIV/AIDS program partially supported by the USG, visited Luanda's naval base, and discussed maritime security with oil company officials. Holmes also conducted a series of interviews on AFRICOM and U.S.-Angola military engagement with some of Angola's most influential media outlets.

¶3. (C) Holmes's message to his Angolan interlocutors was straightforward. Holmes told both FAA Chief of Staff Furtado and acting Defense Minister Rufino that the United States and Angola shared a range of common interests and concerns and that AFRICOM was committed to deepened engagement with Angola. Holmes noted the positive trend in overall bilateral relations, and pointed out that Angola was one of only four countries in Africa with which the USG was undertaking formal bilateral consultations. Holmes said he had come to Luanda to listen to Angolan priorities so that AFRICOM could shape its engagement with Angolan views in mind. Holmes highlighted the importance of peace support operations, and AFRICOM's interest in working with Angola in this area.

¶4. (C) FAA Chief General Furtado laid out the Angolan military's objectives for engagement. He overviewed for Holmes the various areas where the FAA was cooperating with the U.S. military, with a particular emphasis on the strong cooperation in HIV/AIDS programs and English language instruction. Furtado cited the FAA's interest in developing language skills as a part of its training for peace keeping operations and his desire for USG help in training for American-purchased engineering equipment. Furtado stressed

that the FAA's most important engagements were with SADC and CEEAC, citing Angola's participation in the expected September stand-up of the SADC standby brigade and Angola's hosting of the Kwanza 2010 exercise. He noted that deeper engagement with the United States was under review at MOD and that there would be a response "in due time."

¶ 15. (C) Acting Defense Minister Rufino offered a similar message. He too highlighted Angola's ongoing engagements with the United States, citing HIV/AIDS, English language training, engineering, and ship visits. Rufino praised a 2005 MEDFLAG medical exercise and a proposed February English language training proposal, but downplayed the value of the limited training of Angolan officers had had in the United States. Rufino raised a proposed MOU governing mil-mil cooperation and told Holmes this was still under consideration at MOD. Rufino left his U.S. visitors with the impression that MOD was still considering just how far it wanted to take engagement; "the future will reveal the magnitude of our military cooperation," he said.

¶ 16. (SBU) Holmes's visit earned significant press coverage. Embassy arranged for a series of television, radio and press interviews. Angola's major daily newspaper, the "Jornal de Angola," ran a full page story on December 21. The coverage gave Holmes ample opportunity to bring the USG message on mil-mil engagement with Angola to wider Angolan public.

¶ 17. (C) Comment. The GRA rolled out the red carpet for Ambassador Holmes. Given the extent of the access MOD and FAA accorded him, it was clear they welcomed the visit and appreciated exchange with AFRICOM. It also appears that the

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Angolans wanted Holmes to walk away with a two-part message. The first is that the military itself values engagement with the U.S. military and, all things being equal, would appreciate more. The second is that the FAA continues to wait for guidance from senior leadership before engaging more deeply. Navy Chief Cunha, for example, told Holmes that, while the Navy wanted to work with the U.S., "we're implementers; other actions need to be taken in the political arena first." MOD Director for International Affairs Admiral Miau delivered the same message, on two different occasions; "cooperation is a political decision, to be decided by our leadership," he said. Accordingly, the USG will have to ensure support for deepened cooperation at the highest level before we can count on a significantly deepened relationship.

End Comment.

¶ 18. (U) Ambassador Holmes did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departing post.

HAWKINS